Department of LABOR AND INDUSTRIES

ERGONOMICS
Worker Protection

Ergonomics demonstration project: Hops growing and processing

Need

Agriculture differs from fixed industry in that much of the work is done outdoors in varying conditions, the work is seasonal, and the workforce is highly mobile. Many of the methods for identifying and controlling hazards that would work well in a manufacturing environment cannot be used in an agricultural setting. Agricultural employers are seeking examples of methods that they can use to successfully comply with the ergonomics rule.

In Washington, growing hops is one of the most important agricultural industries. The industry has worked to mechanize some of the more demanding jobs, but workers are still required to perform some jobs that have risk factors for Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs).

Goals

The goal of this demonstration project is to show that a hops grower can:

- Identify caution zone jobs and determine which ones are likely to reach hazard levels.
- Use existing controls and best practices to reduce hazards in order to comply with the ergonomics rule.
- Develop new ideas for best and acceptable practices to address hazards.

Project design

John I. Haas Inc. volunteered to become a demonstration project in order to work with the Department of Labor and Industries to find solutions to hazards and reduce WMSDs. The company is among the industry leaders in mechanization, especially for harvesting and processing operations, but there are still many tasks in the growing cycle that involve manual labor and WMSD risk factors.

The company has been identifying caution zone jobs and likely hazards in its seasonal processes. An L&I ergonomist has then been using videotape analysis and interviews to confirm these assumptions. Some existing best practices have been identified, and preliminary recommendations for controls have been proposed.

The project will continue to evaluate the various seasonal processes, and an L&I ergonomist will work with the company to select feasible controls for implementation.

Timetable

September 2000.....Project begins
March 2001.....Evaluation of seasonal work begins
September 2001.....Evaluation of harvesting
January 2002.....Expected completion date

Results

This project will generate:

- A report detailing caution zone jobs and hazard-level risk factors in hops growing and processing.
- A list of existing best practices and other potential controls for reducing hazards.
- A description of the process used to analyze jobs and select controls in an agricultural environment.
- The report will be shared with other agricultural employers through their industry associations, and with all other industries through the L&I web site. Any controls identified that have general applicability will also become part of the searchable database on the website.